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# TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE....

A Column on Consumer Issues  
by Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem's  
Consumer Protection and Antitrust Division

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## **SPAM E-MAIL**

Is your in-box clogged with junk e-mail messages from people you don't know? Are you overwhelmed by unsolicited e-mail offering products or services you don't want? "Spammers" typically use computer programs that search public areas on the Internet to compile, capture, or otherwise "harvest" lists of e-mail addresses from web pages, newsgroups, chat rooms, and other online destinations.

With a few simple precautions, you can minimize the amount of spam you receive. Here's how:

- ✓ Use a unique e-mail address, containing both letters and numbers. Your choice of e-mail address may affect the amount of spam you receive because some spammers use "dictionary attacks" to e-mail many possible name combinations at large ISPs or e-mail services, hoping to find a valid address.
- ✓ Check the privacy policy when you submit your e-mail address to a website. See if it allows the company to sell your address. You may want to opt out of this provision, if possible, or not submit your address at all to websites that won't protect it.
- ✓ Read and understand the entire form before you transmit personal information through a website. Some websites allow you to opt out of receiving e-mail from their "partners" - but you may have to uncheck a pre-selected box if you want to opt out.
- ✓ Use an e-mail filter. Check your e-mail account to see if it provides a tool to filter out potential spam or a way to channel spam into a bulk e-mail folder. You might want to consider these options when you are choosing which Internet Service Provider (ISP) to use.
- ✓ Set up disposable addresses. Decide if you want to use two e-mail addresses - one for personal messages and one for posting in public. Consider using a disposable e-mail address service that creates separate e-mail addresses that forwards to your permanent account. If one of the disposable addresses begins to receive spam, you can shut it off without affecting your permanent address.

Meanwhile, what can you do with the spam in your in-box? Report it, making sure that you include the full e-mail header. The information in the header makes it possible to follow up on your complaint. Send your spam to:

- The Federal Trade Commission, at [uce@ftc.gov](mailto:uce@ftc.gov). The FTC uses the e-mails in this database to pursue law enforcement actions against people who send deceptive spam.
- Your ISP's abuse desk (check with your ISP for the e-mail address). Forwarding your spam to your ISP lets them know about the spam problem on their system and helps them to stop it. Include a copy of the spam, along with the full e-mail header, and at the top of the message, state that you are complaining about being spammed.
- The sender's ISP. Most ISPs want to cut off spammers who abuse their system. Include a copy of the message and header information and state that you are complaining about spam.

*The Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division investigates allegations of fraud in the marketplace. Investigators also mediate individual complaints against businesses. If you have a consumer problem or question, call the Consumer Protection Division at 328-3404, toll-free at 1-800-472-2600, or 1-800-366-6888 (w/TTY). This article and other consumer information is located on our website at [www.ag.state.nd.us](http://www.ag.state.nd.us).*

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